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ABSTRACT

This research sought to determine if male and female preservice teachers differ in their preference for college level course learning activities and teaching methods. A cross sectional method of data collection was used with a total sample of 549 students, 113 males and 436 females. Females expressed a significantly higher preference than males for variables related to instructor and course organization. They also expressed higher preference for variables related to student-instructor rapport. Females preferred viewing films, asking questions, and holding review sessions. Males expressed a higher preference for giving oral reports and independent learning. Females held lower preference than males for true-false exam questions, but higher preference for workbooks and grading on the curve. The significance of these findings for teacher education programs is discussed. (JD)

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Gender Differences in Preservice Teachers' Preference for College Learning Activities

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The purpose of this research was to determine if male and female preservice teachers differ in their preference for college level course learning activities and teaching methods. In this study, preference for learning activities was used rather than learning styles because preservice teachers and their instructors have had many years of experience with such methods and activities as lectures, independent study and library research. These learning activities are easier to control and change than learning styles because teaching methods and learning activities are under the direct influence of instructors and students while the concept of learning styles may have different meanings to students, instructors, and researchers. If differences are found between the genders in their preference for specific activities and methods, college instructors can use this information to plan and present courses that take this differences into account and make learning more interesting and personally satisfying for both genders and increase learning efficiency.

Brainard and Omen (1977) surveyed community college students on their instructional preferences using the Canfield-Lafferty Learning Styles Inventory. They found females were statistically significantly different from males in their preference for course structure and organization, academic expectations, interest in the use of language, and the importance of people in their courses of study. By contrast, males expressed higher preference for independent learning using numbers in learning, having direct learning experiences and a competitive learning environment.

Restow and Edeburn (1983) surveyed 110 sophomore/junior preservice teachers (70 females and 40 males) for their instructional preferences using the Renzuli-Smith Learning Style Inventory. They found statistically significant Chi Square results for higher female preference for teaching games, programmed instruction and lectures. No gender differences were found

in preference for projects, simulation, drill and recitation, peer teaching, discussion, and independent study. They replicated this study in 1984 with 98 female and 55 male sophomore/junior preservice teachers and computed only percentages for the two groups using three categories of preference. They concluded their findings were consistent with their 1983 results and concluded females prefer to engage in more independent individual learning activities than males.

Method

Subjects in this study were undergraduates enrolled in a baccalaureate teacher preparation program in a state assisted, selective admission, mid-western university of 15,000 students when there are 1,540 full time students in teacher preparation. A cross sectional method of data collection was used with a total sample of 549, 113 males and 436 females. The genders were distributed by year in college as follows: Freshman males 17, females 103; sophomore males 29, females 135; junior males 40, females 124; senior males 27, females 72. All of the sample were enrolled in teacher education courses during the second semester of the academic year when the data was collected. The Learning Preference Questionnaire, developed by the author, has 37 Likert-type items that ask college students to express their preference for course learning activities and teaching methods by using a five point scale where 1 represents most effective and 5 is least effective. The items were organized into six areas of college course learning activities which included six items on in-class learning like lectures, films and discussions. The second area, out-of-class activities has seven items and included activities like library research, independent study, field trips and computer aided learning. The third area asked for preferences about course examinations and has five items on types of examinations and the number of exams desired for determining a final grade. The fourth area concerned

course and instructor organization and has five items about course organization, schedules, instructor organization and preparation. Rapport was the fifth area and has four items concerning the feelings between student and instructor. The sixth area has three items on grading systems and asked students for their preferences for using fixed or group standards for assigning grades. The data was analyzed by discriminate analysis and the t-test where the .05 level was used to judge statistical significance.

Results

The Wilks Lambda (0.748 p .000) is highly significant and indicates that the male mean of 1.14 on the discriminate function is significantly higher than the female mean of -0.292. The 37 variable discriminate function properly classifies 71 percent of the males and 77.8 percent of the females. By using a correlation of .20 between a variable and the canonical discriminate function, it was possible to select 18 of the 37 variables for further analysis. When using only 18 variables, the Wilks Lambda was (0.799 p .000) which is also highly significant with a male mean of 0.799 and a female mean of -0.254 on the discriminate function. This 18 variable discriminate function correctly classifies 65.5 percent of the males and 76.3 percent of the females. All six areas of the Learning Preference Questionnaire contributed items to the eighteen items that make up the discriminate function.

Because the discriminate function does not tell us on which specific variables males and females differ, t-tests were computed between males and females using the total sample for each of the eighteen variables to determine gender preferences. All eighteen variables were found to show statistically significant differences between the genders. Females expressed a significantly higher preference than males on variables related to instructor and course organization. Specifically, they prefer instructors

who are well prepared, provide a complete course syllabus, keep the course on schedule and the class on the topic, and inform students about the grading system when the course begins. Females also express significantly higher preference for variables related to student-instructor rapport where they prefer instructors who are friendly, give individual attention, help students after class, and encourage mutual respect. When expressing their preference for classroom learning, females hold higher preference for viewing films, asking instructors questions, and holding review sessions. By contrast males express a higher preference for giving oral reports in class than females and also prefer independent learning. Females hold lower preference for true-false type exam questions, having only a mid-term and final exam but are more favorable than males toward workbooks and grading on the curve. Because the eighteen variable discriminate function had all its variables significantly differentiating male and female preferences for teaching methods and learning activities using the total sample, it seemed important to determine how well the eighteen variables discriminate function would classify males and females at each of the four levels of preservice preparation. The percentage of properly classified males and females for each level of preparation are: Freshman males 76.5, females, 87; sophomore males 63, females 75.9; junior males, 61.5, females 79.5; and senior males 85.2, females 82.9.

Discussion

The finding that females prefer professors who are organized in their teaching and conduct courses that are well organized is consistent with the survey data of Brainard and Omen (1977) who found female community college female students have a higher preference for courses that are structured and organized than do males. The results of the McKeachie, Lin and Mann (1971) study showed that structured instructors were more effective with females

than males and supports the findings of this study. The survey results by Restow and Edeburn (1983) found that female but not male preference for lecture, programmed instruction, and teaching games is consistent with female preference for organization and structure in this study. In the area of student-instructor rapport, McKeachie and Lin (1971) concluded:

> A warm, interpersonally oriented teaching style seems to be generally effective for women teachers, but for men teachers it is effective only for women students and men high in need affiliation, a result fitting with the idea that women are more interpersonally oriented than men.

McKeachie, Lin and Mann (1971) found that thinking and knowledge levels in females correlated higher with instructors who exhibited greater rapport than for males. These two studies are consistent with the findings of this study where females prefer instructors who are friendly, give individual attention, provide after class help, and encourage mutual respect.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the Brainard and Omen (1977) survey data that found males give a higher preference to independent study than females, but do not support the Restow and Edeburn (1984) finding of no differences between the genders in preference for independent study. In summary, the eighteen items that constitute the discriminate function significantly differential males from females in preference for teaching methods and learning activities. Further, the discriminate function properly classifies each gender much better than could be expected by chance at each of the four years in the preparation program.

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